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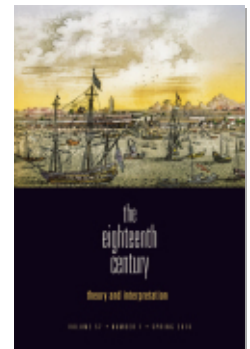
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“Between the Human and Brutal Creation”: Posthuman Agency and the Samuel Frost Corpus

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Every genuine author, in a greater or less degree, leaves in his works, whatever their design, traces of his personal character: elements of his immortal being.









—Rufus Griswold, “The Death of Edgar A. Poe”¹

The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles.

—Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?”²

On a summer evening in 1793, a half moon midway on its journey across the sky became visible in the Massachusetts twilight. Samuel Frost had escaped by day on the 16th of July. He hid in the underbrush just outside of town, haunted, perhaps, by two ghosts. Ten years before, Frost had murdered his father by smashing his head in with a lever, and earlier that day he killed his employer, Elisha Allen. Re-creating the murder of his father, Frost beat Allen’s brains out with a garden hoe. According to the documents that would be printed in the days and months to come, this young man, like the moon in the sky that night, was only half-formed. An unusual creature, neither man nor animal, Frost represented, in the words of three broadsides, “the connecting grade between the human and brutal creation.”³ Frost was apprehended after a few days, on July 20th. In 1783, he had been acquitted of his father’s murder on grounds of insanity, but his murder of Allen produced the death sentence. On All Hallows Eve in 1793, Samuel Frost died at a public hanging in Worcester.

We know all of this because a small but fascinating array of printed materials relating to Frost remains in existence, in archives both physical and digital.⁴ The Frost archive comprises an execution sermon preached just before his hanging and published as a pamphlet shortly after; several brief, syndicated newspaper articles; four broadsides (two offered for sale on execution day) that include various combinations of a third-person account of Frost, his last words or “dying” confession, and a poem reflecting on the “solemn occasion”

The last and
DYING WORDS

OF SAMUEL FROST, who was
 executed at Worcester on Thursday last, for
Murder,
 with a description of his unnatural conduct in the
 murder of his Father, which he committed a num-
 ber of years since—his behaviour during his Trial,
 and while in prison after condemnation, are pub-
 lished, and now selling at this Office.

*They may be had of all the Posts
 from this Office.*

Also—a pertinent and well wrote
P O E M
 on the occasion.

Fig. 1: Advertisement, *The Federal Spy and Springfield Advertiser* I, no. 47 (5 November 1793), 3, col. 3. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

of Frost's execution; and advertisements for these broadsides (see Fig. 1). These publications fit seamlessly into the American gallows print tradition. From the first publication of a North American execution sermon in 1674 to the rise of the popular press in the nineteenth century, readers in the colonies and the new nation consumed hundreds of books, pamphlets, broadsides, and poems describing the lives (and often the deaths) of convicted criminals.⁵ In the late eighteenth century, as Karen Halttunen has demonstrated, such texts increasingly described criminals as animal or otherwise inhuman, just as they do in Frost's case.⁶

If the publications surrounding Frost are consistent with the historical development of the American gallows print tradition, Frost's life is likewise legible in relation to the social configurations of the emerging liberal state.⁷ Frost was a dispossessed young man, who may also have suffered from what we would today call a neurodevelopmental disability. Although it may be tempting to read Frost as a forgotten iteration of the remarkable American individual (some lost, dark avatar of Benjamin Franklin), in fact Frost was one of many who were constitutively excluded from liberal citizenship.⁸ As Immanuel Wallerstein has argued, "the other face of the inclusiveness of citizenship was exclusion," because from its very beginnings the liberal state has denied active citizenship to those deemed as lacking in virtue and/or intellectual capacity.⁹ Since the late

eighteenth century, the list of those excluded has comprised not only criminals and people with disabilities, like Frost, but also slaves, women, animals, and, closer to our own time, detainees like those held at Guantanamo.¹⁰

A major aim of much historically oriented scholarship in the past several decades has been to restore humanity to the dispossessed by retroactively re-incorporating those who were excluded into the realm of the liberal humanist subject.¹¹ Such work has often taken the form of excavating instances of individual agency: as Walter Johnson has argued, history approached “from the bottom up” has become problematically “compressed into the impulse to ‘give them back their agency.’”¹² It is not my intention to deny or minimize the struggles and successes of those on the margin who did achieve some measure of liberal agency, or of the scholars who have directed our attention to them.¹³ Yet, there are countless others, like Frost, who did not seek or achieve such agency, nor pave the way for others to do so. What might we discover if we attend more carefully to cases like Frost’s? And, just as importantly, how do we account for the lives of those who have been excluded from liberal society without retaining its terms of valuation, without conjuring the specter of individual agency?¹⁴

In what follows, I offer a provisional answer by analyzing Frost’s life and deeds as they appear when assembled with the late eighteenth-century print culture that represented, judged, aestheticized, or moralized on that life and those deeds. I call this assemblage of man and media, which blurs the ontological bounds of the human and non-human, the Samuel Frost “corpus.”¹⁵ My first epigraph helps to clarify what it might mean to read Frost as “corpus.” Although phrases like “genuine author” and “immortal being” at first glance imply a liberal framework that would separate art from embodied experience, in fact Rufus Griswold posited a deep interconnection of the material and the immaterial, print, and person. In this unsympathetic obituary, Griswold aimed to traduce his rival Edgar Allan Poe by intimately connecting Poe with his dark works. While Griswold’s motivations here may have been self-serving, his suggestion that there is a constitutive interrelation among art, action, and personhood is illuminating. Though Frost, unlike Poe, may never have put pen to paper, I read Frost as a “genuine author” who quite literally left himself in his works. Griswold’s qualifying phrase, “whatever their design,” suggests that these works that retain traces of their creator need not be poems or paintings: they may instead be deeds, perhaps even extreme actions like murder.

A reading of Frost as *corpus* incorporates this insight by bringing text and human action into the same plane of analysis, rather than approaching Frost as purely textual (which would vest agency in the critic as the producer of meaning and elide any historical Frost), or looking to the historical record to establish the contours of Frost’s authentic existence (and thereby ground claims for his individual agency).¹⁶ Moving through close readings of Frost’s execution sermon, broadsides, execution poem, and the newspaper coverage of his trial and hanging, we can see Frost’s “personal character” and “immortal being” in the

interrelation of his works: his murder of Allen and of his own father, his escape and confession, and the print culture to which these actions gave rise. Importantly, the documents I consider here, as well as the man they represent, are conflicted and contradictory: in the execution sermon, Aaron Bancroft depicts Frost as execrable, but elsewhere Frost appears oddly sympathetic, and even capable of radical empathy, as when the "Account of Samuel Frost" explains that he was found banging his head against the prison wall in order to understand how his victims felt in their final moments. When we look at these publications in tandem with one another and with the man they represent, a unified Frost—real or imagined—does not emerge. Instead, the Frost corpus as a whole explodes the ideal of autonomous agency through its own contradictions.¹⁷

As I have indicated, Frost's murders coincided with the ascendancy of liberal humanism, which was consolidated as the basis of U. S. identity and citizenship in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet the Frost corpus undermines liberalism's fundamental premise, that agency and humanity are coextensive.¹⁸ Countering the liberal view of agency as enacted by an individual, abstract, "human" self, man-media assemblages such as the Frost corpus display an agency is that simultaneously voluntaristic, collective, and material, arising from the interweaving of human actors with texts.¹⁹ The networked agency of the Frost corpus is therefore not human, but posthuman in the sense outlined by Cary Wolfe.²⁰ It collapses "the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism."²¹ Rather than redeeming Frost from characterizations of him as inhuman through a heroic critical intervention that would somehow restore his status as a liberal agent, I trace the potentialities and possibilities of posthuman agency in the Samuel Frost corpus.²²

"WITH BECOMING DETESTATION": LIBERALISM'S DISGUST

In his 1793 execution sermon for Frost, Bancroft encouraged his audience to feel disgust for this "pest of society."²³ In the sermon, a liberal understanding of humanity is predicated on the exclusion of criminals like Frost as inhuman, and therefore outside the community. The liberalism of Bancroft's execution sermon was consistent with a late eighteenth-century shift toward conceiving of criminality as a nonhuman subjectivity, a shift enacted largely via print.²⁴ The earliest examples of colonial execution sermons presented a Calvinistic view of criminality as the result of a divine retraction of restraining grace. By the 1790s, however, the criminal represented in these sermons metamorphosed from an ordinary sinner into a creature at once powerfully other and decidedly man-made.²⁵ Late eighteenth-century execution sermons displayed humanist, Enlightenment concerns and convictions as readily as they evinced the theological underpinnings of earlier sermons. A tale of individual self-fashioning replaced the traditional drama about the fate of the criminal's soul. Thus, as one might expect from a religious form with increasingly secular content, Bancroft's

execution sermon was an internally conflicted document. In form and function it was very much in line with earlier execution sermons, yet whereas earlier American execution sermons centered on the condemned's soul, Bancroft's focused on the making of the liberal subject, and did so precisely through its concurrent construction of the nonhuman.

Bancroft's theme was not only how Frost turned into the kind of creature who could commit the crime of murder, but also how his audience might make themselves differently.²⁶ Attention to the titles of execution sermons underscores this shift. Where early execution sermons were given titles like *Speedy Repentance Urged* (1690, Cotton Mather), *The Folly of Sinning, Opened & Applied* (1699, Increase Mather), and *Death the Certain Wages of Sin* (1701, John Rogers), Bancroft's 1793 sermon was titled *The Importance of a Religious Education Illustrated and Enforced* (see Fig. 2).²⁷ Similar in length and size to these precursors, Bancroft's sermon was printed and sold as a twenty-four-page pamphlet. Unlike many earlier execution sermons, however, Bancroft's text does not discuss Christ and the penitent thief, nor does it draw on salvationist language from the Books of Job or Isaiah. He reads instead from I Samuel 3:13, "His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." There were some later execution sermons, particularly after the Second Great Awakening, that continued the earlier tradition's emphasis on the criminal as representative of the miraculous possibility of divine mercy. But Bancroft's sermon, in its aim of exhorting good parenting through sound secular and religious training, participated instead in the period's widespread emphasis on the importance of education and care for youth.²⁸

Working within the generic conventions of the American execution sermon, Bancroft goes through the list of "gateway" sins that might have set Frost on the slippery slope toward murder, only to conclude that this traditional explanation could not account for Frost's inhumanity:

He never mixed in those scenes of intemperance and dissipation, which frequently corrupt the moral powers of men. . . . [T]he temptations of ambition and avarice had no influence; yet in a country, where all men enjoy those advantages for moral and religious improvement . . . we behold him a savage, possessed of the most malignant and revengeful passions.²⁹

Minor sins did not set Frost up for a later fall. Rather, those sins were conspicuously absent. Frost was figured here not as a human who erred as any of us might, but as "a savage, possessed of the most malignant . . . passions." In the newly formed United States, he had access to "advantages for moral and religious improvement," but to no avail.

Rather than the standard explanations for crime in the early American gallows tradition, Bancroft drew on a secular mode of personal history to account for how Frost, whom he characterizes as a "pest," came to infect society. Though reluctant "to open the graves of the dead, and to expose to publick

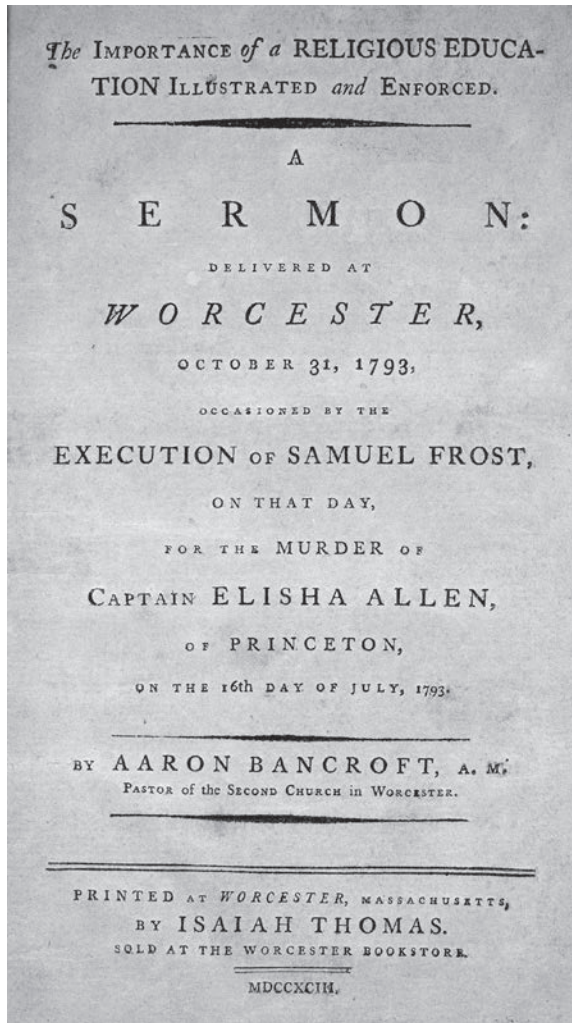


Fig. 2: Aaron Bancroft, *The Importance of a Religious Education Illustrated and Enforced*, title page (Worcester, 1793). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

view the faults of those who have passed," Bancroft nevertheless said that "the father of this unhappy man was greatly deficient. . . . [T]he example set before him was impious, cruel, and barbarous. In this school the son was but too ready to learn."³⁰ (Note that Bancroft nowhere acknowledges the fact that Frost had murdered his father, an omission I will discuss later.) The word of God recedes as Bancroft applied his "doctrine" from the First Book of Samuel to Samuel Frost, an example of the results of bad parenting,

a striking instance of the fatal effects of the neglect of early education. . . . We behold a human being, apparently devoid of all social affection and sense of moral obligation . . . [who] is now with ignominy to lose his life, as a pest of society.³¹

Applying a Lockean paradigm to Frost's upbringing, Bancroft stressed the importance of the strong, unshakeable influence of early impressions on the mind of the child, which take hold before reasoning capacity is fully formed.³²

In Bancroft's sermon, we see that Frost appears as one who failed to make himself what Bruno Latour calls a "fragile and precious thing," a modern human.³³ Yet as Latour points out, the nonhuman emerged in tandem with the human: "modernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of 'man' or as a way of announcing his death. But this habit . . . overlooks the simultaneous birth of 'nonhumanity'—things, or objects, or beasts—and the equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines."³⁴ Bancroft constructed the specter of inhumanity from the events of Frost's life, not in order to save souls but to inspire the successful self-fashioning of the liberal subject. Telling his audience to "aspire to the true dignity of your natures," he encouraged them to distance themselves from Frost by cultivating feelings of disgust for him, which placed Frost outside the "human" sphere of rights-based belonging.³⁵ Instead of offering Frost spiritual counsel, Bancroft praised his audience for reviling Frost: "with becoming detestation and abhorrence, you contemplate the action which brought him to this untimely end."³⁶ He figured this disgust as attractive or "becoming" of his auditors:

Were you thought capable of his crime, you would exclaim, "Are we dogs, that we should do this thing?" We believe you incapable of the crime of murder. . . . The path of honour and distinction in this world lies before you, to animate your minds to virtuous pursuits.³⁷

Bancroft lauded the imaginative limits that prevented his audience from questioning their own humanity ("Are we dogs?"). Though "we" are not dogs, Frost implicitly is. In this separation of human from inhuman enacted via the material, spoken, and print medium of the execution sermon, we see liberalism in the making.

Yet at just this moment, we can also locate the potential of the posthuman. When he finally addressed Frost directly, Bancroft retained his larger emphasis on self-making: "You are to be taken away from among the living, because you have made yourself vile, and are become unworthy longer to be a member of the community."³⁸ Insofar as he has "made [himself] vile," Frost enabled Bancroft's audience to become properly human by cultivating disgust for those like him. Criminals like Frost are part of what must be excluded to shore up a rights-based polity, in which humanity itself is something to which one aspires

("aspire to the true dignity of your natures").³⁹ The antinomies of the liberal worldview thus created a new kind of criminal, one who, through an alchemy of environment and volition, emerges as something neither human nor inhuman. When the "natural" becomes aspirational, and disgust becomes an admirable affect, the criminal, we might say, is un-self-fashioned.

Without doubt, Bancroft's sermon objectified Frost: but, as we will see, it is precisely through these inhuman and material qualities that Frost and the corpus as a whole (including the sermon) attains agency. In contrast to the abstractions of liberal agency, which posit a freedom based on a human universality that is unmoored from the particularities of lived experience (such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and disability), the posthuman agency of the Samuel Frost corpus is embodied and particularized.⁴⁰ Attempting to "restore humanity" to a figure like Frost would have the effect of effacing the space between human and nonhuman that liberalism itself has constructed. And it is precisely from this space that the Frost broadsides generate forms of connection and belonging that are not predicated on exclusion, abstraction or transcendence.

"TO KNOW HOW THEY FELT": RADICAL AFFECT IN THE FROST BROADSIDES

The Frost broadsides encourage a more direct engagement with Frost's very strangeness, in contrast to Bancroft's disgust. As a form of connection that disavows itself, disgust is an affect useful for cultivating liberalism's exclusive, rights-based modes of citizenship and belonging. Yet at the same time, the experience of disgust is predicated on the most visceral forms of connection, whether a bad taste on the tongue or a monster in our midst.⁴¹ Thus it is unsurprising that the Frost corpus's ability to engage readers is not limited to disgust. When we look at Frost's dying confession or at the "Account of Samuel Frost" published alongside it, we find an intricate imaginative economy of affect, which Bancroft's staid injunction of abhorrence does not erase but in fact enables.⁴² And this is not in spite of, but rather through descriptions of Frost's savage inhumanity. Affective engagement increases in proportion to Frost's monstrosity, as readers find themselves drawn to this more-than-human being that exists "between the human and brutal creation."

Each of the Frost broadsides found a market in those attempting to digest this life, which appears by turns fascinating and repellent. Isaiah Thomas printed the first, *The Confession and Dying Words of Samuel Frost*, in Worcester (see Fig. 3). It was sold on execution day, along with a separate broadside, also printed by Thomas, which contained "A Poem on the Execution of Samuel Frost" (see Fig. 4). Both of these execution day broadsides contained the same woodcut engraving, which showed a man hanging from a gallows in front of a large crowd. An official with a gun stands in the foreground on a horse-drawn

**The Confession and
DYING WORDS of
SAMUEL FROST,**
Who is to be Executed this Day, October 31,
1793, for the
Horrid Crime of MURDER.

I WAS born at Princeton, in the County of Worcester, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, on the 14th day of January, 1765. My father's name was John Frost, he had four sons the eldest of whom died when he was nineteen years old—two of my brothers are yet living. My mother is dead: I always regarded her, and ever thought my father had a warrant for her, and that he died her ill; this induced me to kill him, which deed I executed on the 23d of September, 1785, as we were digging a ditch together; I knotted him down with a handspike, and then beat his brains out. I was apprehended and committed to goal in Worcester, and tried before the Supreme Court, and was acquitted contrary to my expectations.

My mother died when I was about fourteen years old, and I always supposed her death was occasioned by the bad treatment she received from my father. He was very charitable, and was void of all affection for his family.

After I was acquitted, and got released from goal, I went and lived with Mr. George Parker, afterwards with Mr. John Glendon, then with Mr. Phineas Gregory, after living with them, I went and lived with Mr. Ezekiel Sawin, then went a second time to Mr. Parker, after this I lived with Mr. Jills Fisher, and then with Mr. Rice. All these people lived in Princeton. Whilst I lived with Mr. Rice, I arrived at twenty-one years of age. I left Mr. Rice, and went to live with a relation, Mr. Benjamin Wilkin, where I tarried about two or three weeks, and then went to Capt. Elisha Allen's, where I lodged one night. From Capt. Allen's I went and lived a short time with Mr. Solomon Parker, and then with several other persons, but was only a little time with each—then I went to live with Mr. Ephraim Osgood, I left him and went to the house where I formerly lived with my father, and tarried there about five months, in the year 1784, but receiving an affront, being told to do something against my inclination, I went off without taking leave, and took to the woods—I wandered about for three days and nights: In the day time I kept in the woods, and at nights went to farms and lodged in barns, unprotected. In the woods I got and eat berries, and gathered apples in orchards, and on them I lived during the three days and nights.

Being tired of living in the woods, I went to Fitzwilliam, to the house of Benjamin Wilkin, my relation, beforementioned, who had removed from Princeton to that place. I arrived there on the 23rd day of August, 1786, at breakfast time I was very hungry and eat heartily—I tarried here until the 30th day of September, the same year.

Soon after this time a number of people were going to Worcester, to try the fitting of the Court—they asked me to go with them, and trusted me. I wanted to see what they would do, and went with them as far as Holden—at this place, stopping at Davis's tavern, I went out to pick fowls to eat, after which I hid down on the ground and went to sleep—when I awoke, I thought I was doing wrong to go with those people to the Court, and would not go with them any further. I left them and went to Princeton—there I met with more people going to Worcester for the like purpose—they gave me some drink. I left them, and went to Mr. Stephen Merrick's where I lodged that night. I then worked for several persons for a few days; and on the 17th day of September, 1786, I went and lived with Capt. Elisha Allen—who took me because it was the desire of a number of people. It was town meeting day, and I went to the meeting.

I lived with Mr. Allen some time—then chiding to go away—I went off at a time when I was sent to pasture with the cows—I was gone about three days, living in a cold—I spent three coppers whilst I was gone, and went almost as far as Boston—then I returned to Capt. Allen's again. I went of several times afterwards, and was absent sometimes a longer and sometimes a shorter time, but did not get any thing by going very but flogging when I returned. Considering myself as a slave, I have thought I had as well die as live as I did—I had a small estate and wanted to work on that, but I could not—Mr. Allen had the care of my estate, and I supposed was paid for my living with him out of it. I thought several times I would kill him, and then thought I would not—At length, on the 16th day of July, 1793, I effected it thus—Capt. Allen was going to set out cabbage plants, and desired me to go with him, and to get a hoe; he went to the spot for planting, and I after the hoe, when I returned with the hoe, I found him stooping to fix a plant—I then thought it would be a good time to put my design in execution, and accordingly went up to him and gave him a blow with the hoe on his head, and repeated it. When I was about giving the third blow, he said, "Fare thee Sam, you have done enough." I made no reply, but continued repeating the blows until I supposed he was dead. I had beaten his head so as it had made a large hole in the ground and his brains came out. After I had finished him,

I went into the woods not far distant, where I remained four days, living on berries, &c. Whilst I was in the woods, I heard the voice of the people who I supposed were after me; I heard them call out—but they did not find me I at length I was tired of being in the woods, as it was hard fare—came and lodged about a house where I had formerly lived, and was discovered by some of the family, who took me in to the house and gave me some victuals, and never fled, excepting taking a few apples from orchards may be called theft.

I declare that I had upon a great aversion to stealing and telling lies, and think them to be great crimes—always meant to tell truth, and never fled, excepting taking a few apples from orchards may be called theft.

The foregoing account was taken from the mouth of Samuel Frost, in prison.

ACCOUNT OF SAMUEL FROST.

SAMUEL FROST was certainly an extraordinary character—his mind was evidently not formed altogether like that of other persons—He thought it no great crime to kill such as he supposed treated him very ill—and did not appear to have a just conception of the heinous crime of Murder—His education appears to have been very indifferent, but his natural capacity in many respects seemed to be equal to persons in general, whose minds have not been cultivated. He had high notions of honesty, and appeared much offended when his honesty was suspected—He appears also to have been a person who regarded truth, and he valued himself upon his probity and sincerity—One striking proof of his diffidence in falsehood appeared when he was indicted before the Supreme Court—he pleaded guilty—he was told that he might plead not guilty, was urged to do so, and was commanded to prison, in order that he might consider of the plea he had made, and retract it, &c. yet notwithstanding on his being again brought into Court, he persisted in pleading guilty. He was sensible of the gravity of his crime, and expressed his gratitude for clemency. Yet, he had a cold savage heart which nothing could melt, and he would talk with the fiercest calm and composure of the heinous Murder he had committed, as though the person who fell a sacrifice to his fury, had been of the brutal creature. He could read and write, and often was found, whilst in prison, reading in the Bible—yet he showed no signs of contrition especially for the unnatural murder of his father. Notwithstanding he read the Bible, he was not fond of conversing with the Clergy, and in general of the many who

visited him, few of them could get him to talk with them. He went two Sundays to meeting after his sentence, but more through persuasion than inclination; and though urged refused to go again—On the first Sabbath that he attended divine service he appeared to be offended with the minister, because he mentioned the murder of his father. Frost did not like to be twisted of that—that it was an old matter, and was settled long since—On being asked by the High Sheriff if he wished to have a sermon preached on the day of his Execution, he answered that he did not care any thing about it—he did he would attend to the sermon on condition that he might not be brought back to prison, but he carried from the meeting house to the place of execution.

He had been known to say, that his killing Capt. Allen was rather more than he ought to have done—and that he would, if it was not done, stay seven years first. He was a most dangerous person to society—On being asked if he had his liberty, if he would kill any other person, he answered there was one more he believed he should. He told some persons who visited him one day, that he believed his father and Allen had a very tough time of it—being asked why he thought so, he said he had been beating his head against the walls of the prison, in order to know how they felt whilst he was killing them.

He appeared to have a very confused idea of a future State—supposed he should go to Purgatory—and did he believed the Devils were large black wigs—and many other false chimerical expressions of folly and absurdity he uttered respecting a future existence—He did not appear regretful that the time of his execution was fixed at so distant a period—he wished, he said, to have it over a fortnight sooner. On the whole, as a man, he was savage—void of all the finer feelings of the soul, and destitute of the tender affections of filial love and gratitude—His passions to have been a being cut in a different mould from those of mankind in general, and to be the connecting grade between the human and brutal creation.


The above will enable the reader to form some idea of his rational faculties.

He was about five feet four inches high, rather slenderly built, and very strong. He had a peculiar way of rolling or twisting his head, and his countenance was very unpleasant.

Printed and sold at Mr. TOWN'S Printing-office, in Worcester. Price 6d. Also, A Poem on the Occasion. Price 2d.

Fig. 3: Samuel Frost et al., *The Confession and Dying Words of Samuel Frost* (Worcester, October 1793). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

death cart, and men with guns seem to surround the crowd from behind. The two subsequent variations of this broadside reprinted the same confession and "Account of Samuel Frost," and also included the poem. One also gave the poem a different title, "A Poem on the Solemn Occasion." Sold by Jonathan Plummer, a traveling trader, *Last Words and Dying Confession of Samuel Frost* was printed in Boston, most likely by E. Russell.⁴³ It contained eight woodcut engravings, making it the most visually arresting of the broadsides, as well as a brief description of Frost's behavior at the execution itself in the lower right corner (see Fig. 5). The other post-execution broadside, often written by Henry Blake



A

P O E M.

On the EXECUTION of

SAMUEL FROST,

Who is to be Executed this Day, October 31, 1793, for the Murder of Capt. ELISHA ALLEN, of Princeton, Massachusetts.

" Learn to be wise from others harms,
" And you shall do full well."

REVIEW each ACT, on LIFE's important stage,
In every CLIMATE and through every AGE ;
And still we find each passing scene will shew,
" That VIRTUE only, is our bliss below."
VICE for a while, with dazzling form may please,
Affume the borrow'd smile of careless EASE,
Display the charms of pleasure's roscate BOWERS,
Her gay ATTENDANTS and her happy hours ;
But yet ere long shall TRUTH expose the CHEAT,
Her weak delusions and her soul deceit,
The hidden poison of her BREAST reveal,
And paint the terrors which her smiles conceal.
This day, my FRIENDS, exhibits to MANKIND
Th' effects which follow from a VICIOUS MIND ;
Denounc'd by JUSTICE, in life's early bloom,
A WRETCH misguided seeks the silent tomb.
In tender AGE, when softer passions glow,
When PITY moistens at the tale of woe,

Deaf to her cry, HIS ARM, on malice bent,
To shades of DEATH, an aged PARENT sent :
Yet here his ART eluded JUSTICE' claim,
He knew the MANIAC or the FOOL to feign,
Impos'd on CANDOR, with a vague pretence,
And MERCY wink'd upon the black offence.
Ten YEARS revolv'd, when lo! by ANGER driven,
Again he breaks the great command of HEAVEN ;
Again the MURDERER lifts his vengeful hand,
And aims the deadly weapon at his FRIEND.
Thus by his arm the FATHER, PATRON, dy'd,
At once the TRAITOR and the FARRICIDE.
Insulted JUSTICE now the WRETCH demands,
And sentenc'd DEATH awaits her stern commands.
Ye YOUTH who view the sadly solemn scene,
Learn hence the laws of VIRTUE to esteem,
Learn hence that he who from his DUTY swerves
Will one day meet the VENGEANCE he deserves :
Ne'er let the flowery paths of VICE delude,
Nor let REVENGE upon your thoughts intrude.

Fig. 4: "A Poem on the Execution of Samuel Frost" (Worcester, 1793). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.



The Confession and Dying Words of SAMUEL FROST,

WHO WAS EXECUTED AT WORCESTER, THE 31st DAY OF OCTOBER, 1793, FOR THE

Horrid Crime of MURDER.

I WAS born at Princeton, in the County of Worcester, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts on the 15th day of January, 1765. My father's name was John Frost, he had four sons the eldest of whom died when he was 19 years old—four daughters are yet living. My mother is dead I always regarded her, and ever thought my father had no affection for her, and that he eld her ill; this induced me to kill him, which deed I executed on the 23^d of September, 1793, as we were digging a ditch together; I knocked him down with a handspike, and then beat his brains out. I was apprehended and committed to goal in Worcester, and tried before the Supreme Court, and was acquitted contrary to my expectations.

My mother died when I was about fourteen years old, and I always supposed her death was occasioned by the bad treatment she received from my father. He was very selfish, and void of all affection for his family.

After I was acquitted, and got released from goal, I went and lived with Mr. George Parks; afterwards with Mr. John Gileston, then with Mr. Palchus Gregory; after living with them, I went and lived with Mr. Ezekiel Sawin, then a second time in Mr. Parks, after this I lived with Mr. Jesse Fisher, and then with Mr. Rice. All these people lived in Princeton. Whilst I lived with Mr. Rice I arrived at twenty-one years of age; I left Mr. Rice, and went to live with a relation, Mr. Benjamin Willson, where I tarried about two or three weeks, and then went to Capt. Eliza Allen's, where I lodged one night. From Capt. Allen's I went and lived a short time with Mr. Solomon Parker, and then with several other persons but was only a little time with each—then I went to live with Mr. Ephraim Osgood; I left him and went to the house where I formerly lived with my father, and tarried there about five months, in the year 1786; but receiving an affront, being told to do something against my inclination, I went off without leave, and took to the woods—I wandered about for three days and nights; in the day time I kept in the woods, and at night went to farms and lodged in barns, unperceived. In the woods I got eat berries, and gathered apples in orchards, and on them I lived during the three days and nights.

Being tired of living in the woods, I went to Fitzwilliam, to the house of Benjamin Wilson, my relation, beforementioned, who had removed from Princeton to that place. I arrived there on the 21st day of August 1786, at breakfast time. I was very hungry and eat heartily—I tarried here until the 31st day of September, the same year.

Soon after this time some of the people were going to Worcester, to stop the King of the Court—they asked me to go with them, and treated me. I wanted to see what they would do, and went with them as far as Holden—at this place, stopping at David's tavern, I went out to pick some apples to eat; after which I laid down on the ground and went to sleep—when I awoke, I thought I was doing wrong to go with those people to stop the Court and would not go with any further. I left them and went to Princeton—there I met with more people going to Worcester for the like purpose—they gave me some drink. I left them and went to Mr. Stephen Merrick's where I lodged that night. I then worked for several persons a few days; and on the 17th day of September 1786, I went and lived with Capt. Eliza Allen—who took me because it was the desire of a number of people. It was town meeting day, and I went to the meeting.

I lived with Mr. Allen some time—when choosing to go away—I went off at a time when I was first to pasture with the cows—I was gone almost three days, living as I could—I spent three coppers whilst I was gone, and went almost as far as Holden—when I returned to Capt. Allen's again. I went off several times afterwards, and was absent sometimes a longer and sometimes a shorter time, but did not get any thing by going away but begging when I returned. Considering myself as a slave, I have thought I had as well die as live as I did—I had a small estate and water to work on then, but I could not—Mr. Allen had the care of my estate, and I supposed was paid for my living with him out of it. I thought several times I would kill him, and then thought I would not—At length, on the 23rd day of July 1793, I effected it—then Capt. Allen was going to set out cabbage plants, and ordered me to go with him, and to get a hoe; he went to the spot for planting, and I after the hoe; when I returned with the hoe, I found him lying flat at a plant—then thought it would be a good time to put my design in execution, and accordingly went up to him and gave him a blow with the hoe on his head, and repeated it. When I was about to give the third blow, he said, "Forbear Sam, you have done enough." I was much surprised, but continued repeating the blow until I supposed he was dead. I had beaten his head so that it had made a large hole in the ground and his brains came out. After I had finished him, I went into the woods not far distant, where I remained four days, living on berries, &c. Whilst I was in the woods, I heard the voices of the people who I supposed were after me; I heard them talk much; but they did not find me; at length I was tired of being in the woods, and as it was hard for—time and lattered about a brook where I had formerly lived, and was discovered by a number of the family, who took me into the house and gave me some victuals and food. I was then brought to Worcester goal again, and now shall certainly be hanged.

I declare that I had always a great aversion to stealing and telling lies, and think them to be great crimes—I always meant to tell the truth, and never stole, excepting taking a few apples from orchards may be called theft.

The foregoing account was taken from the mouth of Samuel Frost in prison.

ACCOUNT OF SAMUEL FROST.

SAMUEL FROST was certainly an extraordinary character—his mind was evidently not formed altogether like those of other persons—he thought it no great crime to kill such as he supposed treated him very ill—and did not appear to have a just conception of the heinous crime of Murder—His education appears to have been very indifferent, but his natural capacity in many respects seemed to be equal to persons in general, whose minds have not been cultivated. He had high notions of honesty, and appeared much offended when his

honesty was suspected.—He appears also to have been a person who regarded truth; and he valued himself upon his probity and sincerity.—One striking proof of his dislike to falsehood appeared when he was indicted before the Superior Court—he pleaded guilty—he was told that he might plead not guilty, was afterwards remanded to prison in order that he might consider of the plea he had made, and retract it, &c. yet notwithstanding this being again brought into Court, he persisted in pleading guilty. He was sensible of favors granted him, and expressed his gratitude for them.—Yet he had a most savage heart which nothing could mollify, and he would talk with the same calmness and composure of the horrid Murders he had committed, as though the persons who fell a sacrifice to his fury, had been of the brutal creation. He could read and write, and often was found, whilst in prison, reading in the Bible—yet he showed no signs of contrition especially for the unnatural murder of his father. Notwithstanding he read the Bible, he was not fond of conversing with the Clergy, and in general of the many who visited him, few of them could get him to talk with them. He went two Sundays to meeting after his sentence, but more through persuasion than inclination; and though urged refused to go again.—On the first Sabbath that he attended divine service he appeared to be offended with the minister, because he mentioned the murder of his father.—Frost felt he did not like to be twitted of it—that was an old matter, and was settled long since.—On being asked by the High Sheriff if he wished to have a sermon preached on the day of his Execution, he answered that he did not care any thing about it—he said he would attend to the sermon on condition that he might not be brought back to prison, but he tarried from the meeting house to the place of execution.

He had been known to fear, that his killing Capt. Allen was rather more than he ought to have done—and that he would, if it was done, pay several years in jail. He was a most dangerous person to society.—On being asked if he had his liberty, if he would kill any other person, he answered there was no one he believed he should. He told some persons who visited him one day, that he believed his father and Allen had a very tough time of it—being asked why he thought so, he said he had been hearing his head against the walls of the prison, in order to know how they felt whilst he was killing them.

He appeared to have a very confused idea of a future state—supposed he should go to purgatory—and he believed the Devils were large black wigs—and many other such chimerical expressions of folly and absurdity, he uttered respecting a future existence.—He did not appear pleased that the time of his execution was fixed at six o'clock a period—he wished, he said, to have it over a fortnight sooner. On the whole, as a man, he was a savage—void of all the finer feelings of the soul, and deficient of the under efforts of liberal lore and graces—he appears to have been a being call in a different mould from those of mankind in general, and to be the consisting grade between the human and brutal creation.

The above will enable the reader to form some idea of his rational faculties. He was about five feet four inches high, rather slenderly built, and very strong. He had a peculiar way of talking or twitching his head, and his countenance was very unpleasant.

A P O E M,

ON THE EXECUTION OF SAMUEL FROST.

"Learn to be wiser from others' pains;
And you will feel full woe."
REVIEW each ACT, OR LIFE'S
Important hours, and through every
In every CLIMATE and through every
AGE;
And still we find each passing scene will
thence,
"That VIRTUE only, is our bliss
below."
VICE for a while, with dazling form
may please,
Assume the borrow'd splendor of celestial
RAYS,
Display the charms of pleasure's rosyate
sweets,
Offer gay ATTENTIONS and her happy
hours;
But yet ere long shall TRUTH expose
the COINAGE,
Her weak delusions and her foul deceit,
The hidden poison of her BEASTLY
FEARS,
And paint the terrors which her smiles
conceal.
This day, my FRIENDS, exhibits to
MARSHALL
Th' effects which follow from a VICI-
CIOUS MIND;
Denounc'd by JUSTICE, in life's early
bloom,
A WRETCH misguided seeks the silent
tomb.
In tender AGES, when affar passions
glow,
When a weak creature at the state of Noe,
Deaf to her cry, MIS ARM, on malice
insists,

To shades of DEATH, and aged PA-
RENTS SENE!
Yet here his act eluded JUSTICE'
claim.
He knew the MANIAC or the FOOL to
flee,
Impud' on CANONS with a vulgar pre-
tence,
And HEAVY wink'd upon the black of-
fence.
TWO YEARS remov'd, when lo! by AN-
WER driv'n,
Angels he breaks the great command of
HEAVN'S!
Again the MURDERER lifts his verge-
ful hand,
And aims the deadly-weapon at his
FRIEND.
That by term the FATHER, PATRON
and
Attends the TRAITOR and the PARIA-
RIDE.
Infinite JUSTICE sees the WRETCH
demand,
And frown'd DEATH awaits her stern
command.
Ye YOUTH who view the sadly solemn
scene,
Beware hence the laws of VIRTUE to ef-
fem,
Learn hence that he who forms his DU-
TY fervor
Will one day meet the VENGEANCE he
deserves!
No'er let the HOWL' path of VICE de-
lure,
Nor let REVENGE upon your thoughts
insure.

PRINTED AND SOLD BY HENRY BLAKE & Co—KEENE, STATE OF NEW-HAMPSHIRE.

Fig. 6: Samuel Frost et al., *The Confession and Dying Words of Samuel Frost* (Keene, 1793). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

and crossbones, exclamation points, and gallows scenes. Exerting a material agency, such typography encouraged readers to imagine the man and events presented as similarly captivating.⁴⁴ Even the headline of the relatively spare Keene broadside (Fig. 6) offers a good example of this dynamism, in its combination of all capitals, boldface type, and italicization.

Print documents like these broadsides, which include first-person statements “taken from the mouth” of criminals condemned to execution, many of whom could not write, had a history stretching back nearly as far as execution sermons.⁴⁵ The early eighteenth century saw an increased interest in the criminal’s voice; by the mid-eighteenth century, dying-words broadsides had largely replaced an earlier genre of criminal conversion narratives and pious confessions. In older confessions, a third-person commentator often offered a sketch of the final moments of the condemned, and an evaluation of the likelihood that the malefactor had reached heaven. In these broadsides, an anonymous “Account of Samuel Frost” functioned as a sort of gloss to the confession, an almost social-scientific apparatus that might help readers assess Frost’s multiple, contradictory aspects. Late eighteenth-century confessions were often more sensational than their predecessors, offered more explicit details about the crime, and, in line with liberalism’s emphasis on the individual, were increasingly concerned with unusual “characters” rather than an archetypal sinner.⁴⁶

The broadsides containing Frost’s confession and the “Account of Samuel Frost” were no exception to this trend. The sensationalism of these broadsides manifested not only via typography, but also through their foregrounding of a set of concerns, including radical, anti-patriarchal violence, which linked Frost to the larger revolutionary Atlantic world. In the confession, Frost suggested that Allen’s murder is justified by his *de facto* enslavement to Allen:

I went off several times . . . but did not get any thing by going away but a flogging when I returned. Considering myself as a slave, I have thought I had as well die as live as I did.—I had a small estate and wanted to work on that, but I could not—Mr. Allen had the care of my estate, and I supposed was paid for my living with him out of it. I thought several times I would kill him, and then thought I would not.

After being acquitted of his father’s murder in 1783, Frost lived with a series of men until, in 1786, he “went and lived with Capt. *Elisha Allen*, who took me in because it was the desire of a number of people.” Frost saw himself as Allen’s slave because Allen did not allow Frost to come and go as he pleased. Allen subjected Frost’s body to punishment while compelling him to work on his land, even though, Frost supposed, the expenses Allen incurred by having taken Frost in were paid out of Frost’s own estate. For these reasons, the “Account of Samuel Frost” indicated, “he thought it no great crime to kill such as he supposed treated him very ill.” Like so many in the late eighteenth century, Frost saw his violent acts as being in accordance with a revolutionary ethic of justice.

In 1793, the year Frost murdered Allen, the French and Haitian revolutions gathered momentum, with Louis XVI executed in January and slavery abolished in Haiti later that year. These currents are clearly on display in Frost's confession, with its emphasis on enslavement as a justification for violence and its own local history of revolt. Western Massachusetts had witnessed Shays' Rebellion in 1786–87. In his confession Frost details his decision to join, and subsequently abandon the Shaysites, many of whom were war veterans, in their march to oppose the state government by stopping the court at Worcester.⁴⁷ Frost went with the rebels "as far as Holden—at this place, stopping at Davis's tavern, I went out to pick some apples to eat; after which I laid down on the ground and went to sleep—when I awoke, I thought I was doing wrong to go with those people to stop the Court, and would not go with them any further."⁴⁸ Although Frost chose not to pursue economic justice alongside these revolutionaries, in the *Confession* he sought to justify his murder of Allen on the basis of economic and personal oppression at Allen's hands. And it is the same court at Worcester that would ultimately sentence Frost to die for this crime.

The solar calendar in the 1793 Worcester *Almanack*, which, like the first Frost broadside, was printed by Thomas, further connects Frost to revolutionary sensibilities through its references to the French Revolution (see Fig. 7). Frost murdered Allen on July 16th, 1793. The *Almanack* enthusiastically marks July 14th as the fourth anniversary of "the glorious revolution in France," and marks July 16th with "Ça Ira! Ça Ira! Ça Ira!"⁴⁹ Translating roughly to "It'll Be Okay," "Ça Ira!," the most popular song of the French Revolution, expressed violently democratic sentiment: "Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira, / les aristocrates on les pendra! / Le despotisme expirera / La liberté triomphera" ("Oh. It'll be okay, be okay, be okay, / The aristocrats, we'll hang 'em all. / Despotism will breathe its last, / Liberty will take the day").⁵⁰ The revolutionary atmosphere was palpable and influenced not only Frost's murders but also the affective responses they generated. In addition to his murder of Allen, a patriarchal guardian figure, Frost was also guilty of literal patricide. Ten years before his murder of Allen, he murdered his father.⁵¹ The Frost broadsides make much of this, with a manicule at the top of the Boston version (Fig. 5) emphasizing the fact front and center. Frost committed this "*shocking Crime*" at a time when Britain had been styled (by Thomas Paine and others) as the "bad" parent from which a now-grown America had righteously severed itself. We might reasonably speculate that, three short years after General Charles Cornwallis's surrender, Frost was acquitted partly on the basis of this larger political and military landscape of the 1780s. But, with the ongoing violence threatened by the Shaysites and others, the escalation of events in Haiti and France, and the move toward a stronger centralized government in the United States between 1784 and 1793, his murder of a second patriarchal figure, Allen, produced the sentence of death.

Yet even in this more conservative political climate, it is easy to imagine that there would have been many who continued to sympathize with Frost in

JULY begins on *Monday*, hath xxxi Days.

THE grand ethereal bow its tints displays,
The various colours of the Solar rays :
Descending drops ting'd with the grateful light,
Compose th' extended arch to charm the sight.

SOLAR CALCULATIONS, &c.

Days.	☉	Days.	☉	Days.	☉
1	☿ 10 7	13	☿ 21 33	25	♊ 3 2
3	12 2	15	23 27	27	4 56
5	13 56	17	25 22	29	6 51
7	15 50	19	27 17	31	8 46
9	17 45	21	29 12		
11	19 39	23	☿ 1 7		

M. D.	W. D.	Calendar, remarkable Days, observations, &c.	☀ rise.	☀ sets.	L. D. H. M	☀ S.	7*s rise.
1	2	<i>Governments should</i>	4 28	7 32	15 4	3	1 21
2	3	Visitation of Vir. Mary.	4 28	7 32	15 4	3	1 17
3	4	<i>be supported for</i>	4 29	7 31	15 2	4	1 13
4	5	American Ind. 1776.	4 29	7 31	15 2	4	1 10
5	6	<i>the good of the</i>	4 30	7 30	15 0	4	1 6
6	7	<i>governed; not</i>	4 30	7 30	15 0	4	1 2
7	F	6th Sund. past Trinity.	4 31	7 29	14 58	4	0 58
8	2	<i>for the emolument</i>	4 31	7 29	14 58	4	0 54
9	3	<i>of the governours.</i>	4 32	7 28	14 56	5	0 50
10	4	Columbus born in France,	4 32	7 28	14 56	5	0 46
11	5	(and lived 59 years.	4 33	7 27	14 54	5	0 42
12	6	<i>The man who injures</i>	4 33	7 27	14 54	5	0 38
13	7	<i>no person, nor proper.</i>	4 34	7 26	14 52	5	0 34
14	F	Annivers. of the glorious	4 35	7 25	14 50	5	0 30
15	2	(revolution of France.	4 35	7 25	14 50	5	0 25
16	3	Ca Ira! Ca Ira! Ca Ira!	4 36	7 24	14 48	5	0 21
17	4	Com. Camb. Mahomet	4 37	7 23	14 46	6	0 17
18	5	(died, 634, aged 64.	4 38	7 22	14 44	6	0 12
19	6	<i>ty, nor good name,</i>	4 38	7 22	14 44	6	0 8
20	7	St. Margar. and Bridget.	4 39	7 21	14 42	6	0 4
21	F	8th Sund. past Trinity.	4 40	7 20	14 40	6	eve.
22	2	St. Mary Magdalene.	4 41	7 19	14 38	6	11 52
23	3	<i>ought not to be</i>	4 42	7 18	14 36	6	11 48
24	4	<i>molested by society,</i>	4 43	7 17	14 34	6	11 44
25	5	Dog Days begin and Cal	4 45	7 15	14 30	6	11 40
26	6	St. Ann. (nights.	4 46	7 14	14 28	6	11 36
27	7	<i>nor any individual.</i>	4 47	7 13	14 26	6	11 32
28	F	9th Sund. p. Trin. St.	4 48	7 12	14 24	6	11 28
29	2	(Joseph. <i>on account of</i>	4 49	7 11	14 22	6	11 24
30	3	St. Martha, Virgin.	4 50	7 10	14 20	6	11 20
31	4	<i>his opinion.</i>	4 51	7 9	14 18	6	11 17

Fig. 7: Thomas's Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Newhampshire & Vermont almanack, with an ephemeris, for the year of our Lord 1793 (Worcester, 1792). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

opposition to patriarchy. This is especially apparent in the broadsides. Frost begins his confession with a brief personal history and genealogy of his living and dead relations, and relates that while laboring beside his father ten years before, "I knocked him down with a handspike, and then beat his brains out," because of his ill-treatment of Frost's mother. Frost's direct ownership of these deeds and his radical claim that he murdered Allen because he saw himself as enslaved are the most voluntaristic moments in the Frost corpus. Unlike the broadsides, Bancroft's sermon avoids the potentially dangerous idea that Frost's crimes may have been motivated by anti-patriarchal impulses.⁵² Bancroft's aim is to separate Frost from the community through disgust, and so he studiously avoids connecting Frost to the revolutionary narrative that would have been entirely apparent to his audience.⁵³ By contrast, while the broadsides do not redeem Frost's humanity, they do suggest that these murders are, at least in part, a result of a radical struggle for some more equitable mode of belonging.

Importantly, the basis of this belonging is both material and affective. The broadsides represent Frost's actions as unnervingly consistent not only with a radical, violent politics but also with an enumeration of Frost's own valuation of honesty and attempts at sympathy. Inhuman and cold-hearted, Frost in the "Account" nevertheless expresses an uncanny desire to share his victims' experiences:

He told some persons who visited him one day, that he believed his father and Allen had a very tough time of it—Being asked why he thought so, he said he had been beating his head against the walls of the prison, in order to know how they felt whilst he was killing them.

Frost demonstrates here a startling capacity for intersubjective imagination. In beating his head against the prison wall in order to occupy the position of his victims, Frost channels liberal moral philosophers of his day like Adam Smith, who argued that since we "have no immediate experience of what other men feel," the only way to have an idea of how others are affected is "by bringing the case home to [one]self."⁵⁴ Taking this idea to an extreme of literality, Frost reminds readers that he is a body to be punished as much as a mind to be puzzled over. Indeed we see in Frost's actions an implicit revision of Smith. Unlike Smith's liberal abstractions, the theory of sympathy suggested in the Frost corpus suggests the necessity of embodiment for intersubjective imagination.⁵⁵ Frost's visceral display insists on sympathetic connection as an embodied phenomenon.

“LAUNCHED INTO ETERNITY”:
ART, CRIME, AND THE COLLECTIVE

In banging his head against the prison walls, Frost illustrates that embodiment is necessary to generate the affective connections that ground community. Around the same time, Immanuel Kant was developing a metaphysical system in which the materiality inherent in embodiment likewise informed what he called *sensus communis* (common sense), the basis for which was the aesthetic.⁵⁶ Most critical discussion of the aesthetic since has emphasized transcendence and purity. But for Kant and other late eighteenth-century thinkers, the aesthetic assures connection between man and the world he perceives: it forges connections via materiality, between human and nonhuman bodies.⁵⁷ Like those excluded from liberalism’s abstract modes of belonging, the aesthetic in late eighteenth-century philosophy also occupied the space between human and nonhuman. It thus should not be a surprise that in the execution poem for Frost, we see a modern view of the criminal as artist or genius, whose agency emerges out of and exceeds the exclusions of liberalism.⁵⁸ In this final section, I show how the very inhumanity that Bancroft constructs in his sermon merges with the aesthetic in the execution poem for Frost.⁵⁹

This thirty-eight-line poem, entitled “A Poem on the Execution of Samuel Frost,” was printed and offered for sale as a separate broadside on execution day, and later appended to the two post-execution broadside editions of the account and confession.⁶⁰ It begins with an injunction very much in line with an older model of gallows literature: “*Learn to be wise from others harms, / And you shall do full well.*”⁶¹ Highly moralistic, the theme is virtue rewarded and vice punished, as the poem’s quotation from Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1734) “That virtue only, is our bliss below” indicates. The poem suggests that Frost, “At once the traitor and the patricide,” is being executed not only for murdering his “patron” Allen, but also as punishment for the murder of his father. These rhymed pentameter couplets depict Frost as having counterfeited insanity in order to escape punishment for that initial crime of patricide:

Yet here his ART eluded JUSTICE’ claim,
He knew the MANIAC or the FOOL to feign,
Impos’d on CANDOR, with a vague pretence,
And MERCY wink’d upon the black offence.

In suggesting that the court itself fell victim to Frost’s “art,” this poem perhaps suggests that poetry may be more potent than law. More broadly, the poem reinscribes a more traditional perspective on crime in its emphasis on Frost’s guilt. But it offers a crucial and eminently modern twist: Frost is not just guilty, but artful. Through an aesthetic performance, feigning the maniac or the fool, he slips between the cracks of human justice.

The poem works to correct this loophole, and hold Frost fully to account. Like older gallows publications, it attempts to repurpose Frost's act as a specifically moral lesson. Unlike the warnings of an earlier period, however, the slippery-slope moral as applied to Frost's case is nonsensical:

Ye YOUTH who view the sadly solemn scene,
 Learn hence the laws of VIRTUE to esteem,
 Learn hence that HE who from his DUTY swerves
 Will one day meet the VENGEANCE he deserves:
 Ne'er let the flowery paths of VICE delude,
 Nor let REVENGE upon your thoughts intrude.

Wayward youth ought to take care, the poem suggests, lest they be tempted onto the path of viciousness and wind up on the gallows. Yet Frost had not followed any "flowery paths of vice"—drinking, lust, lying, or any of the "gateway" sins of traditional gallows literature. In Frost's case, the temptation the poem warns against is nothing less extreme than parricide itself, since this is the very first act in which Frost's own "duty swerve[d]."

Like Bancroft's sermon, then, the execution poem distinguishes Frost from ordinary sinners and places him beyond the pale of the human. But whereas the sermon makes Frost explicitly brute and inhuman, he emerges in the poem instead as an artist. Artful and full of "vague pretence," he appears as a deceiver uniquely guilty and incapable of being accounted for by the performance of older execution rituals and publications. The inhuman space created for a criminal like Frost in Bancroft's sermon reappears in the poem as the more capacious, mediated space of the aesthetic. In the sermon Frost is included in an emerging liberal society as who, or what, is excluded.⁶² He is the figure of negative personhood by which members of this society can recognize their own human belonging, and is bereft even of the capacity for true guilt. On this view, Frost's crimes are not even crimes, but the result of deficient education and upbringing. In contrast, when the poem finds itself incapable of accounting for Frost in the terms of a society that has faded, he emerges as a posthuman agent, exceeding the role of excluded other to which Bancroft's liberal stance would like to restrict him. Frost is guiltier than the everyday sinner, because he is responsible not only for the crimes committed, but also for the design employed in their execution and cover-up. Where the gambit of the sermon is to make Frost inhuman, the poem intensifies this maneuver: it makes him an artist.

In a familiar modern view, the aesthetic is increasingly monumentalized insofar as it withdraws from the world, and otherwise dismissed as kitsch, pornography, or "mass culture."⁶³ As Daniel A. Cohen has argued, we can trace the origins of American popular culture to the tradition of gallows literature. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the American popular press irresistibly performed a double abjection, of the aesthetic and of the criminal,

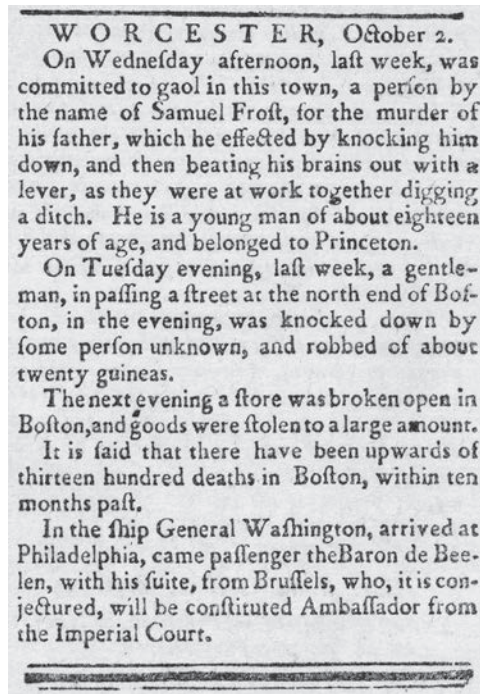


Fig. 8: "Worcester, Oct 2," *The Massachusetts Spy: Or, Worcester Gazette* VIII, no. 649 (2 October 1783): 3, col. 4. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

which readers both voraciously consumed and loudly disparaged. As changes in printing technology allowed for cheaper and more heavily illustrated representations of the criminal, the increasingly sensationalized popular press filled its pages with shocking details of far more outrageous crimes than Frost's. Sensationalized confessions, criminal pamphlets, criminal biographies, and trial transcripts eventually came to stand in for the criminal's fleshly body as it was locked within the inscrutable walls of the penitentiary.

Although Frost never experienced incarceration in a penitentiary system, experiments with private punishment already were underway during his lifetime.⁶⁴ Setting the stage for a nearly total eclipse of the criminal's physical body by a body of print, 1790s print culture had begun to contain transgressions like Frost's in ways that an earlier gallows tradition never imagined.⁶⁵ This historical and cultural shift set the stage for the emergence of the posthuman agency that I have been tracing in the man-media hybrid of the Frost corpus. This form of agency is evidenced most fully in the newspaper coverage of Frost's crimes, trials, and, finally, his public execution. In the pages of a 1783 issue of *The Massachusetts Spy*, "a person by the name of Samuel Frost" made his first appearance in print (see Fig. 8). This account is all the print world saw of Frost until his trial was briefly mentioned in *The Salem Ga-*

zette and *The Vermont Gazette* in May of 1784: "Samuel Frost, a minor, for the murder of his father. The jury after being together eighteen hours, acquitted [*sic*] him on account of Insanity."⁶⁶ Judging from the "Account" and from the much more widespread newspaper coverage of Frost's 1793 murder trial, there seems to have been every opportunity for Frost to have renewed the insanity defense through which he was acquitted of his father's murder in 1784. But Frost persisted in his plea of guilty, and, even, according to the newspaper reporting, "*demand*ed to be hung."⁶⁷

A number of newspapers printed one of two accounts of Frost's 1793 trial.⁶⁸ All report Frost was indeed "a person of sufficient understanding" to be "properly guilty" (and hence executable), yet this decision stands in tension with what these same accounts describe as his "apparent hardened insensibility and stupid indifference, which prove him destitute of every social principle, and of all proper sense of the enormity of the crime."⁶⁹ In keeping with the contradictions of liberalism, Frost's callousness and incapacity for sociality appear in the news coverage as both the very reasons to execute (his indifference exacerbating the heinousness of his crime, a view we see in the sermon and poem) and the reasons to acquit once again (his inadequate understanding of wrongdoing, a view also put forward in the sermon). Failing to evince a full humanity, the criminal is here a liminal creature beholden to and produced by man rather than God, "properly guilty" yet "destitute of every social principle." By insisting that he be tried and hanged, Frost refuses liberalism's exclusion and claims his existence as a social being. Like the banging of his head against the prison wall to understand how his victims felt, Frost's demand to be punished in his body, according to the letter of the law, was an assertion of belonging.

But what kind of belonging? In the newspaper coverage, the fact that Frost's disregard for life extends even to his own (in his demand to be hanged) is taken to heighten his inhumanity and affirm the propriety of his exclusion from liberal society, which, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, placed a premium on biological life.⁷⁰ Frost stridently refuses to be incorporated into the liberal sphere as an insane person, though the newspaper coverage suggests this was the path he was most encouraged to take. A plea of insanity would have kept him alive, but also under the control of another patriarchal custodian like Allen.⁷¹ By contrast, the public display and punishment of his body would have secured him—in an earlier day—a place among a community of other sinners. The pre-modern community he may have been seeking to join through the judicial or religious ritual of public execution had all but disappeared by 1793. Instead, at the time he was tried, his crimes, execution, and the surrounding print materials "launch" him into a different mode of belonging: a collective, mediated existence that extends beyond biological death yet remains material.

Even before he becomes a corpse, Frost becomes corpus, a body of print that persists to this day. By December 1793, more than half a dozen papers across the country had covered Frost's execution.⁷² The following account appeared in several of these (see, for example, Fig. 9):

WORCESTER, Nov 6.

On Thursday last, Samuel Frost was executed in this town, pursuant to his sentence, for the murder of Capt. Elisha Allen, of Princeton, on the 16th day of July last. This man, just ten years before he murdered Capt. Allen, killed his father, for which horrid crime he was tried, but acquitted by the jury, who supposed him insane. Before execution, a Sermon was preached by the Rev. Aaron Bancroft, to a very large audience. The criminal was present. After which he was carried to the place of execution. He shewed few or no signs of penitence. On being asked by the High Sheriff if he wished to say any thing to the spectators, he answered that he had not much to say—he would not have them follow him.—The High Sheriff repeatedly asked him if he wished his execution delayed? He answered, as often as asked, No!--as he was to go, (that was his expression) it had better be soon over. The scaffold dropped, and this uncommon murderer was launched into eternity. It is thought the number of spectators present were about 2000.

Fig. 9: "Worcester, Nov. 6," *The Essex Journal & New Hampshire Packet* no. 491 (13 November 1793): 3, col. 3. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

In the 30th ult, Samuel Frost was executed in Worcester, pursuant to his sentence, for the murder of capt. Elisha Allen, of Princeton, on the 16th day of July last. This man, just ten years before he murdered capt. Allen, killed his father, for which horrid crime he was tried, but acquitted by the jury, who supposed him insane. Before execution, a sermon was preached by the rev. A. Bancroft, to a very large audience. The criminal was present—After which he was carried to the place of execution. He shewed few or no signs of penitence. On being asked by the high sheriff, if he wished to say any thing to the spectators, he answered, that he had not much to say—he would not have them follow him. The sheriff repeatedly asked him if he wished his execution delayed? He answered as often as asked, no! as he was to go (that was his expression) it had better be soon over. The scaffold dropped, and this uncommon murderer was launched into eternity. It is thought the number of spectators present, was about 2 000.⁷³

After hearing the sermon, Frost says that he has nothing to say and indicates his readiness to be hanged.⁷⁴ Ready “to go,” he was surrounded by a large group of spectators that included vendors selling copies of the first broadside containing his confession and the “Account” or the broadside “Poem on the Execution of Samuel Frost.” Frost died on October 31, but in subsequent printings of these broadsides, and in newspaper accounts, he survived his own death.

By insisting on execution, or at least avoiding a verdict of not guilty by reason of insanity, Frost in some degree directed his own destiny. Yet the Frost corpus has agency not primarily as a result of Frost’s individual will, nor solely as a result of the vibrant materiality of print itself, but more due to its rhetorical, taxonomic, historical, and imaginative existence *between* the human and the nonhuman.⁷⁵ The posthuman corpus engendered by Frost and his crimes, together with their representations in print, is part of a still larger collective. Laconic, impenitent, and resolute, this “uncommon murderer” met his death before a large, wondering audience whose gaping members were then extended geographically and temporally via imaginative engagement with a snippet of print, or pixels on screen. For the curious businessman a thousand miles distant in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1793, or for the student or scholar perusing the digitized *Archive of Americana* collection more than two hundred years later, the corpus can even give us some idea of Frost’s appearance. *The State Gazette of South Carolina* reported that Frost was “a short man, of a dark complexion, short black hair . . . easily known by his constantly shrugging up his shoulders, stretching out his arms, and shaking his head,” while the “Account” describes Frost as “about five feet four inches high, rather slenderly built, and very strong. He had a peculiar way of tossing or twitching his head, and his countenance was very unpleasant.”⁷⁶ The Boston broadside included a woodcut engraving that seems to have been meant to represent Frost (Fig. 5). These representations of Frost’s fleshly body, like the body of print surrounding it, offers a fascinating if not flattering portrait.

The mediated collectivity of the Frost corpus would be entirely missed by a reading that relied on liberal norms of agency as operating directly, via intention and consciousness. Its posthuman agency exists only in the space between reality and representation, a space first created by and for the criminal.⁷⁷ From certain angles of vision, the Frost corpus does exhibit individual agency. But a reading of the corpus that isolates these few instances—rather than reading it as a whole—would be limited indeed. Posthuman agency includes these voluntaristic moments, but it is not wholly the property of the individual subject, nor is it primarily oppositional. Situated “between the human and brutal creation,” posthuman agency is, to draw again on Latour, “delegated, mediated, distributed, mandated, uttered” by assemblages like the Frost corpus.⁷⁸

Rita Felski has suggested that to regain a robust view of the aesthetic we need also to rethink agency: specifically she calls for recognition of texts as non-human actors.⁷⁹ My theorization of the posthuman agency of the Samuel Frost

corpus, grounded on this recognition of texts as nonhuman actors, contributes to such a renewal of the category of the aesthetic in eighteenth-century scholarship. In the literary criticism of the last few decades, much-needed attention to historical and cultural context has largely replaced the aesthetic object as the heroic (liberal) agent, while the aesthetic object in turn becomes passive and inert. The settlement, in which one “side” appears as fully agentic and the other as wholly determined, will remain intact until we revise “prevailing views about the heroic, self-propelling, or oppositional nature of agency.”⁸⁰ Although Felski does not address recovery projects directly, her argument has important implications for such scholarship, which often retains a heroic view of agency.⁸¹ Acknowledging this, I maintain that we can best account for Samuel Frost and countless other human-media assemblages of the long eighteenth century, from Aphra Behn to Olaudah Equiano and Nat Turner, not by recovering their authentic, forgotten, or maligned voices but by literally re-membering the bodies of writing that sprung up in response to their lives and deeds.

Strengthened rather than limited by its materiality, posthuman agency becomes most efficacious when the boundaries of the human are most unsettled. Today, when definitions of citizen and noncitizen, human and nonhuman—and the ethical obligations such definitions entail—are once again profoundly unsettled, a posthuman understanding of agency will prove more robust than the liberal conceptions that have held sway. Returning to the archive to account for those dark figures like Frost who inhabit the antinomies of liberalism, explainable neither by text nor context—not nature, and not culture—we can reopen the possibility of a more truly inclusive polity, which was at once promised and foreclosed by humanism.

NOTES

1. R. W. Griswold, “Death of Edgar A. Poe,” *New-York Daily Tribune* (9 October 1849): 2, cols. 3–4.

2. Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?: From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225–48.

3. Samuel Frost et al., *The Confession and Dying Words of Samuel Frost* (Worcester, 1793), col. 4. All citations of Frost’s *Confession* and the “Account of Samuel Frost” will refer to this edition.

4. Much of this material has been digitized and is collected in the *Archive of Americana*. Although Samuel Frost is by no means widely studied, two recent historians have attended to individual texts from the Frost archive. Karen Halttunen draws on the “Account of Samuel Frost,” published in at least three versions in 1793, as a piece of evidence for her compelling argument that ideas of the criminal as a moral monster were increasingly prevalent in the late eighteenth century (*Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* [Cambridge, Mass., 1998], 77, 262). Daniel A. Cohen incorporates a discussion of Aaron Bancroft’s sermon in his argument that ministers began increasingly to explain deviance as a result of flawed education (*Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674–1860* [New York, 1993]). Rather than collating individual pieces of evidence from many cases in order to support a broad historical argument, like either of these important studies, this essay

instead gives sustained, literary attention to the entire body of writing surrounding just one, not particularly remarkable criminal.

5. Daniel A. Cohen offers a detailed account of the rise and development of American gallows literature in *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace*. See also Daniel A. Cohen, "Blood Will Out," in *Mortal Remains, Death in Early America*, ed. Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein (Philadelphia, 2003), 31–56; Ronald A. Bosco, "Early American Gallows Literature: An Annotated Checklist," *Resources for American Literary Study* 8 (1978): 81–105; and Thomas M. McDade, *The Annals of Murder: A Bibliography of Books and Pamphlets on American Murders from Colonial Times to 1900* (Norman, 1961).

6. See Halttunen, 1–6, 208–40.

7. For an explanation of how liberalism preceded the widespread use of the term, which did not appear until 1810, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914* (Los Angeles, 2011), 2. Throughout, this essay is informed by Wallerstein's argument for centrist liberalism as the reigning ideology of the modern geoculture from the time of the French Revolution, or 1789.

8. See Ed White for an alternative reading of Benjamin Franklin, who is usually understood as either an "exceptional individual" or an "embodiment of the system" (*The Backcountry and the City: Colonization and Conflict in Early America* [Minneapolis and London, 2005], 177). Arguing against this bifurcation, White explores Franklin's life and writings in relation to institutional structures, rather than prioritizing one over the other. He instead sees Franklin "as class agent, as booster, as local organizer" (178).

9. Wallerstein, 144. For a lucid discussion of citizenship and exclusion in liberalism, see Wallerstein, 144–57. Scholars focusing on early America have long debated the role of liberalism, with its emphasis on the individual in shaping the political and cultural landscape of the late eighteenth century. Vernon L. Parrington argued for the dominance of liberalism, which, in his view, subsumed republicanism, with its emphasis on civic duty, in the U. S. Yet in the latter half of the twentieth century, the "republican synthesizers," J. G. A. Pocock, Bernard Bailyn, and Gordon Wood, popularized the view that republicanism was preeminent in the period, and offered an alternative to liberalism. For an overview of this scholarship, see Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism in the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford, 2004), 142–61. My own thinking aligns with Dillon and Isaac Kramnick (*Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* [Ithaca, 1990]), who argue that early American politics and culture drew on liberalism to "appropriate and transfigure" the terms and values of classic republicanism (Dillon, 151).

10. In some cases, members of these groups were denied citizenship entirely, as in the 1857 Dred Scott Decision. See Colin Dayan's illuminating analysis of the resonances between the history of exclusion, especially in relation to race and slavery, and contemporary human rights abuses in *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton, 2011).

11. Individual agency is intimately linked to the definition of "the human" in the liberal tradition: in this view, to be human is to possess an individual will and the capacity to act according to that will; see Walter Johnson, "Agency: A Ghost Story," in *Slavery's Ghost: The Problem of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore, 2011), 8–20. As I have indicated, Frost's humanity is put in question throughout the Frost corpus; but rather than recuperate Frost's humanity, my goal here will be to bring into view the distributed forms of agency that liberalism both disavows and produces.

12. Johnson, 8. Because the protocols of New Historicism have often invisibly relied on a liberal view of agency (despite an ostensible stance against Cold War liberalism), these studies often implicitly or explicitly aim to recover and restore liberal agency to these excluded individuals. Referring to this "wide-ranging recuperative tendency" in early American Studies, White and Michael Drexler have observed that a "pedagogical emphasis on reading against the grain to recover unrepresented voices has become stan-

dard practice" ("The Theory Gap," *American Literary History* 22, no. 2 [2010]: 480–94, 486). My interest in shifting this emphasis has been inspired by David Kazanjian's critique of the "benevolent desire to impute a familiar political agency to the subaltern" ("When They Come Here They Feel So Free": Race and Early American Studies," *Early American Literature* 41, no. 2 [2006]: 329–37, 336); Alan Liu's nuanced and sensitive reflection on the methods and meanings of New Historicism (*Local Transcendence: Essays on Postmodern Historicism and the Database* [Chicago, 2008]); and Jennifer Fleissner's discussion of historicism in relation to American literary studies ("Historicism's Blues," *American Literary History* 25, no. 4 [2013]: 699–717).

13. Excellent examples of such work are numerous. They include Joanna Brooks's incisive analysis of black counterpublics ("The Early American Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 1 [2005]: 67–92); Jeannine DeLombard's provocative recovery of the unlikely origins of African Americans' civic personhood in crime publications (*In the Shadow of the Gallows: Race, Crime and American Civic Identity* [Philadelphia, 2012]); and Simon Gikandi's powerful description of the ways in which slavery shaped the culture of taste, which African slaves and their descendants in turn cultivated in order to assert their own selfhood (*Slavery and the Culture of Taste* [Princeton, 2011]).

14. In its reconsideration of agency, my work overlaps with new directions in ecocriticism that articulate the profound interrelation of the human and the nonhuman. As ecocritics have increasingly emphasized, the late eighteenth century marked the start of the Anthropocene, when geologic time and human history began to intersect, and when an irreducible human-world, thing-phenomenon, or nature-culture gap began to emerge in modern thought. Ecocritics have thus begun to scrutinize the idea that agency is a distinctively human capacity. See for example Monique Allewaert's analysis of parahuman agency in the eighteenth-century plantation zone (*Ariel's Ecology* [Minneapolis, 2013]); Stacey Alaimo's exploration of material agency and environmental ethics (*Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* [Bloomington, 2010]); and Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's assessment of the possibilities of a material ecocriticism ("Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity," *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 3, no. 1 [2013]: 75–91).

15. In its aim to reorient our understanding of the modern era such that a humanism best expressed in the tenets of liberalism is no longer at its center, this essay's reading of Frost's textual remains together with his embodied biological life contributes to a growing body of posthumanist scholarship. For a lively discussion of how best to decentralize the human, see the exchange by Lucinda Cole, Donna Landry, Bruce Boerher, Richard Nash, Erica Fudge, Robert Markley, and Cary Wolfe in "Speciesism, Identity Politics, and Ecocriticism: A Conversation with Humanists and Posthumanists," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 87–106.

16. In contrast to my simultaneously material and textual approach, the new materialisms (which are frequently linked to posthumanism) have sometimes been understood as promoting a "material turn" that would counter a prior "linguistic turn" in order to "retrieve the body from discourse . . . (where 'body' refers not only to the human body but to the concrete entanglements of plural 'natures,' in both human and more-than-human realms)" (Iovino and Oppermann, 76). For a compelling discussion of how a materialist approach to literary studies might upend such either-or logic, see Allewaert, "Toward a Materialist Figuration, a Slight Manifesto," *English Language Notes* 52, no. 2 (2013): 61–77, which argues that a materialist literary studies methodology can successfully incorporate insights from not only from poststructuralism, but also New Historicism: "a figurative materialism must study non-literary texts, here not primarily of the forms they offer (as Greenblatt's New Historicism did so brilliantly) but for the figurative operations on which they depend and that they transmit" (70).

17. In his preference for the term "actant" to describe the "quasi-agency" of nonhu-

man assemblages, Latour at once acknowledges and sidelines debate about thinking agency only in relation to the human, or indeed, of thinking humanity only in relation to oppositional agency (*Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* [New York, 2005], 54). As Diana Coole has noted, "Agency has been central to modern conceptions of politics but it is a complicated and contested idea that seems to have fallen into both theoretical and historical crisis" ("Rethinking Agency: A Phenomenological Approach to Embodiment and Agentic Capacities," *Political Studies* 53 [2005]: 124–42, 124). While there has been a flurry of recent interest in how we might alter our view of agency in the face of contemporary challenges, my work argues for the importance of a historical perspective on nonhuman agencies.

18. Theorists of the posthuman have argued that the ontological and biological bounds that fix the human are always necessarily blurred; thus with characteristic levity, Latour opines: "to speak of humans and nonhumans allows only a rough approximation that borrows from modern philosophy the stupefying idea that there are humans and nonhumans" ("The Berlin Key, or How to Do Words with Things," in *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*, ed. P. M. Graves-Brown [New York, 2000], 10–21, 12).

19. This approach brings print, embodied action, and larger institutional structures into the same nonhierarchical plane of analysis, rather than overemphasizing one at the expense of the others. Both White and Matt Cohen have recently argued for the necessity of such a disciplinary "shift in perspective" in Early American Studies away from purely discursive formations. White examines backcountry cultures through the lens of "practical ensembles," arguing that "eighteenth-century actors understood themselves as living in a society of relatively fluid collective forms, and through these local building blocks they approached those matters we more loosely capture with generalities like 'politics,' 'economy,' or 'culture'" (17). Elucidating complex communication networks, Matt Cohen argues against the ahistorical bifurcation between oral and print cultures that has structured much of the scholarship on early American culture, particularly in relation to indigenous peoples (*The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* [Minneapolis, 2010], 2).

20. See Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis, 2009). Both Matt Cohen and Stacey Margolis demonstrate the relevance of "network theory" to eighteenth-century America. Margolis points to Charles Brockden Brown as a preeminent example of an early American author explicitly invested exploring of "the hidden, widespread and unexpected connections that make an information society possible" ("Network Theory Circa 1800: Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 45, no. 3 [2012]: 343–67, 344).

21. Wolfe, xv. Posthumanism, in this view, holds that the category of "the human" requires a simultaneous historical and conceptual construction of a nonhuman other. It refers to animals, subaltern humans (e.g., criminals, women, and slaves), and plants, as well as manmade and/or "natural" objects (e.g., newspapers and rocks). Posthumanism has been developed by a wide range of thinkers who do not all use the term directly, including Donna Haraway, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Derrida. My perspective aligns most closely with Karen Barad's definition of posthumanism as "a refusal to take the distinction between 'human' and 'nonhuman' for granted, and to found analyses on this presumably fixed and inherent set of categories" (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* [Durham, 2007], 32).

22. Scholars attempting to incorporate the insights of posthumanist thinking into the study of those who have been part of marginalized identity groups necessarily face serious difficulty because of the deeply disturbing history in which members of these groups have been figured as nonhuman in order to justify their oppression. For a lucid analysis of this challenge, see Warren Liu's discussion of the difficulty scholars of Asian American literature have had in articulating "a theoretical response to this [Latourian] type of quasi-object/subject, in which the human and the nonhuman mingle and emerge as

simultaneously real/natural, narrated/discursive, and collective/social" ("Posthuman Difference: Traveling to Utopia with Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4, no. 1 [2012]: 1–23).

23. Bancroft, *The Importance of a Religious Education Illustrated and Enforced* (Worcester, 1793), 17.

24. Here it is helpful to keep in mind Wolfe's differentiation of philosophical posthumanism, a line of thinking that opposes the "protocols and evasions" of humanism, from a transhumanism that is ultimately an "intensification of humanism" associated with a liberal ideal of autonomous and "triumphant disembodiment" (xv–xvii).

25. Although narratives of sin and punishment remained important to crime literature into the early nineteenth century (and beyond), identification of individual deviance and explanation of its origins in the story of an individual life began to take precedence. Execution sermons were preached either the Sunday before the execution, or on execution day. The criminal was usually present, and these sermons—preached by leading ministers rather than, as in England, minor clergy—drew large crowds. By all accounts nearly as many people heard the sermon as were present at the execution itself, and these sermons then were among the first to reach a more extended audience via print. See Bosco, "Lectures at the Pillory: The Early American Execution Sermon," *American Quarterly* 30, vol. 3 [1978]: 156–76.

26. My reading of Bancroft's sermon runs counter to a widespread consensus that execution sermons remained largely unchanged through the latter half of the eighteenth century. For example, both Bosco ("Lectures") and Halttunen stress that goal of the execution ritual was reconciliation, a healing of the fissure caused by the crime, wherein the criminal played the dual role of moral example and sacrificial Christ figure, putting evil in service of salvation (41–49). Wayne C. Minnick argues that every execution sermon at least implied the existence of an all-powerful God, man's free will, the preeminence of life after death, and damnation for all sinners except those who repent through Jesus Christ ("The New England Execution Sermon, 1639–1800," *Speech Monographs* 35 [1968]: 77–89, 82). Bancroft's sermon fits these molds only at a stretch.

27. This embrace of liberal secularism is apparent in the titles of other later execution sermons, such as *Warning Against Drunkenness* (1816, David D. Field) and *A Discourse* (1825, Jonathan Going).

28. See Daniel A. Cohen's discussion of Bancroft's sermon in his explication of the growing emphasis early national ministers placed on faulty education as the source of deviance: "One might have expected that the case of a young man who had brutally murdered two of his elders would inspire a sermon arraigining the depravity and ingratitude of youth. Instead, Bancroft's discourse stressed the importance of juvenile education" (91).

29. Bancroft, 17.

30. Bancroft, 17–18.

31. Bancroft, 16–17.

32. For more on early American education more broadly, especially in relation to John Locke, see Gillian Brown, *The Consent of the Governed: The Lockean Legacy in Early American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001). For the role of education in relation to liberalism, see Wallerstein: "Liberalism . . . preached that virtue could be taught, and it therefore offered the managed progression of rights, the managed promotion of passive citizens to the status of active citizens" (147).

33. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 138.

34. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 13.

35. Bancroft, 21. It is useful to recall Michel Foucault's observation that, in the eyes of the state, the possibility of identification with the condemned is one of the shortcomings of public modes of punishment (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* [New York, 1995]). In the U. S., Benjamin Rush explicitly criticized public punishments because of

this possibility of “misplaced” identification (*An Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals, and Upon Society* [Philadelphia, 1787]).

36. Bancroft, 20.

37. Bancroft, 20–21. Bancroft here references 1 Samuel 17:43, “And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods,” and 2 Kings 8:13, “But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?”

38. Bancroft, 23.

39. In Agamben’s terms, Frost is a figure of dehumanized “bare life” included in political life by means of exclusion (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen [Stanford, 1998]). Dillon offers a particularly lucid explanation of the seemingly paradoxical nature of liberalism’s inclusive exclusions: “rather than simply standing as external to liberalism, this private position [of women]—and indeed, the entire notion of privacy and private property—must be seen as crucial to the structure and meaning of liberalism” (3); therefore “this exclusion [of women and African Americans from liberalism] can be reversed in dialectical terms: that is, it is demonstrably the case that this exclusion *includes* white women and African Americans in an externalized—but foundational—position” (17). See also Margolis, *The Public Life of Privacy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham, 2005).

40. For an analysis of the integral—if submerged—roles of corporeality, textuality, and gender in liberal theory, see Dillon, esp. 11–48.

41. Over the last decade or so, literary critics and philosophers have become increasingly interested in the affect of disgust; these include Daniel Kelley and Nicolae Morar, “Against the Yuck Factor: On the Ideal Role of Disgust in Society,” *Utilitas* 26, no. 2 (2014): 153–77; Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (New York, 2011); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005); and William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

42. On execution day, the poem was published in a separate broadside that could be purchased at the same time as the broadside containing the “Account” and “Confession”; the two subsequent Frost broadsides contained all three texts.

43. For an illuminating discussion of Jonathan Plummer’s career as an “author-peddler” and the audiences he reached with broadsides like *Last Words and Dying Confession of Samuel Frost*, including the young poet John Greenleaf Whittier, see Michael C. Cohen, *The Social Lives of Poems in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia, 2015), 1–39, esp. 22.

44. For a provocative analysis of the dynamic agency of typography in early American print culture, see Marcy J. Dinius, “‘Look!! Look!!! at This!!!!’: The Radical Typography of David Walker’s *Appeal*,” *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 55–72.

45. Because many criminals could not write, criminal confession as a genre troubles a concept closely linked to liberal concepts of agency in this period: authorship (see Daniel A. Cohen; and Louis P. Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776–1865* [New York, 1989]). It seems reasonable in this case to imagine that Frost did write his own confession, since the “Account of Samuel Frost” indicates that “he could read and write.” Yet while our ability to determine Frost’s literacy would be crucial for a reading of Frost as a liberal agent, it remains secondary to my theorization of the posthuman agency of the Frost corpus.

46. As Daniel E. Williams writes, confessions in this period “exhibited a much greater concern for the imagination than they did for the conscience” (*Pillars of Salt: An Anthology of Early American Criminal Narratives* [Madison, 1993], 13).

47. I am grateful to Daniel A. Cohen for drawing my attention to Frost’s connection to Shays’ Rebellion. Arguing for the centrality of “backcountry” insurrections such as Shays’, White laments the tendency amongst historians to understand such events “as either localized versions of national phenomena or, worse, as so many *symptoms* of a broad unrest to be registered by the urban centers” (2). See also Robert A. Gross, ed., *In*

Debt to Shays: The Bicentennial of an Agrarian Rebellion (Charlottesville, 1993); and Leonard L. Richards, *Shays's Rebellion: The American Revolution's Final Battle* (Philadelphia, 2002).

48. *Confession*.

49. *Thomas's Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Newhampshire & Vermont almanack, with an ephemeris, for the year of our Lord 1793* (Worcester, 1792).

50. "Ça ira," quoted in Albert Marrin, *Thomas Pine: Crusader for Liberty* (New York, 2014), 88. English translation from the American Social History Project's *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution* website (George Mason University and City University of New York, 2001). See also Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics, 1787–1799* (Ithaca, 1996), 34–60.

51. See Jay Fliegelman's influential analysis of the complexities of antipatriarchal thought and action in a new republic founded on revolutionary ideals (*Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* [Cambridge, 1982]).

52. The publisher of the printed version of Bancroft's sermon includes a footnote explaining that Frost had murdered his father (22).

53. The "Account" indicates that Frost had attended Sunday meeting twice after his sentence, and had been offended by the minister for mentioning his murder of his father. He "said he did not like to be twitted of that—that it was an old matter, and was settled long since." It is possible that this minister was Bancroft, who consequently did not mention this murder on execution day out of respect for Frost's wishes. The content of the sermon, however—in particular, Bancroft's disdain for Frost—suggests otherwise. Even if Bancroft were the minister mentioned in the "Account," the execution sermon's audience, whom Bancroft was at pains to distance from Frost, would have been a much larger crowd, and much more potentially unruly.

54. Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759], ed. Knud Haakonssen (New York, 2002), 11–12.

55. See Bruce Burgett's related argument about the necessary relationship between embodiment and the formation of the public sphere in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century U. S. in *Sentimental Bodies: Sex, Gender, and Citizenship in the Early Republic* (Princeton, 1998).

56. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* [1790], trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, 1987), 159–62.

57. A number of late eighteenth-century thinkers readily elided any distinction between the material and the abstract. As Edward Cahill has noted, many contemporary writers on the aesthetic were invested in "linking the sensory perception of objects to the processes of association" and easily assimilated the "proximity of the material and the ideal" (*Liberty of the Imagination: Aesthetic Theory, Literary Form, and Politics in the Early United States* [Philadelphia, 2012], 12, 201). Paul de Man revived this integrative view: "the *aesthetic* is not a separate category but a principle of articulation between various known faculties, activities, and modes of cognition" ("Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* [New York, 1984], 263–90, 264–65).

58. The aesthetic assumes a quasi-sacred role in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as that which bridges the otherwise irreducible divide between appearances and reality. Yet at the same time, art also becomes increasingly marginal to social and political life. As part of this process, an overdetermined liminality comes to define both the criminal and the artist (not coincidentally, as the Frost corpus will suggest) as alienated and abject. These dark, twinned figures are carefully excluded from the liberal realm of consensus and self-governance. They emerge in tandem with, but are not reducible to, liberal humanism. See Agamben's argument that the aesthetic becomes increasingly marginal as the "anthropological machine of humanism" grows (*The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell [Stanford, 1994], 29).

59. Cahill ultimately offers a different understanding of the force of aesthetic in the

early U. S. Arguing for the aesthetic as a mode of theorizing most useful for those interested in consolidating an elite, Cahill demonstrates that aesthetic theory complemented the vision of the Federalists. Though "the political aims of Federalist criticism went unfulfilled [in the nineteenth century] . . . its literary aims had a significant effect on nineteenth-century culture" (225). Though convinced by Cahill's argument, I am interested in an alternative tendency within the eighteenth-century discourse of the aesthetic, which Cahill also notes, to give rise to "collective models of subjectivity" (12).

60. In the Boston broadside, the poem is re-titled "A Poem on the solemn Occasion."

61. "A Poem on the Execution of Samuel Frost" (Worcester, 1793). All references are to this edition.

62. See Agamben, *The Open*; Dillon; and Margolis, *The Public Life of Privacy*.

63. This understanding of art was most famously articulated in the work of the Frankfurt School. See, for example, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York, 1990), 120–67; and Herbert Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume 4* (New York, 2007), 82–112.

64. Mark E. Kann has argued that a system of penitentiary punishment that denied liberty to a significant proportion of "citizens" on the margins became necessary in this period, as a solution to the problem of how to maintain order in a nation engendered by antipatriarchal rhetoric (*Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early American Republic* [New York, 2005]).

65. For a lucid analysis of the centrality of the penitentiary in nineteenth-century American culture, see Caleb Smith, *The Prison and the American Imagination* (New Haven, 2011). Dayan's discussion of the racial dimensions of the twenty-first-century incarceration explosion is also salient here: "the prediction for future ex-criminal disenfranchisement rates suggests how black citizens in the United States, once convicted of crime, will be indefinitely excluded from the society in which they live" (60).

66. See *The Salem Gazette* III, no. 135 (11 May 1784): 2, cols. 2–3; and *The Vermont Gazette*, or *Freeman's Depository* I, no. 49 (10 May 1784): 3, col. 1.

67. *The Columbian Centinel* XX, no. 9 (9 October 1793): 3, col. 1.

68. These included *The Massachusetts Spy*, *The Daily Advertiser*, *The Essex Journal*, and *The New Hampshire Gazette*. By September, papers carried one of two main accounts, one longer and one shorter. Frost's demand of execution by hanging appeared in the shorter version. Newspaper coverage of Frost's first trial was sparse by comparison.

69. *The Massachusetts Spy*: Or, *Worcester Gazette* XXII, no. 1069 (26 September 1793): 3, col. 3.

70. See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, ed. Michel Senellart (New York, 2008).

71. The so-called "wild-beast test," which dated from Henry de Bracton's thirteenth-century work, *Of the Laws and Customs of England*, had long guided application of the insanity defense. Bracton's insane criminal was "not much above the beasts, who lack reason" (quoted in Nigel Walker, "The Insanity Defense before 1800," in "The Insanity Defense," ed. Richard Moran, special issue, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 477 [1985]: 25–30, 28).

72. Many of these excerpted large portions of "The Account of Samuel Frost." Newspapers covering Frost's execution included *The Massachusetts Spy*, *The Concord Herald*, *The Columbian Sentinel*, *The Independent Chronicle*, *The Oracle of the Day*, *The Essex Journal*, *The New Hampshire Journal*, *The Daily Advertiser*, *The Impartial Herald*, *The Weekly Register*, *The New Hampshire Gazette*, and *The Baltimore Daily Intelligencer*.

73. "Warren, Nov. 30," *Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser* 4583 (19 December 1793): 2, col. 3.

74. The newspaper coverage describing Frost's behavior at his execution contrasts

with the brief “eyewitness” account given in column 4 of Plummer’s Boston broadside (see Fig. 5); here Frost reportedly says “*That he would not wish YOUNG PEOPLE should follow his steps.*” It is possible that Plummer is the author of this account of Frost’s final moments, since it contrasts with the newspaper coverage yet aligns with traditional “last words” accounts. For more on Plummer, see Michael C. Cohen.

75. My formulation of posthuman agency owes much to Jane Bennett’s theorization of matter as “vital” and agency as distributed across human and nonhuman actors in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, 2010). Yet the posthuman view of agency I am arguing for here, which includes but is not limited to individual agency, retains the link between agency and subjectivity that Sharon Krause has argued is necessary for democratic politics: “In denying the link between agency and a subjectivity that is reflexive and individuated, albeit not sovereign, the new materialism threatens to eviscerate the grounds for holding persons responsible. Consequently, it cannot sustain a model of agency that is viable for democratic politics” (“Bodies in Action: Corporeal Agency and Democratic Politics,” *Political Theory* 39, vol. 3 [2011]: 299–324, 317).

76. *The State Gazette of South Carolina* LV, no. 4242 (12 August 1793): 2, col. 4; “Account.”

77. Viewed this way, the “post”-human is not “after” or “beyond” the human. The posthuman is better understood as “between” the human and the nonhuman; it is the mediation that makes possible both the human/nonhuman distinction and the agency that exceeds these categories both ontologically and historically.

78. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 138.

79. Rita Felski’s understanding of text as “a fellow actor and co-creator of relations, attitudes, and attachments” productively dismantles the static figuration of the artist as “a self-authorizing subject, an independent agent who summons up actions and orchestrates events” (“Context Stinks!,” *New Literary History* 42, vol. 4 [2011]: 573–91, 583, 590). But rather than renouncing the aesthetic as a result, Felski instead rightly points out that the distinctiveness of art “does not rule out connectedness but is the very reason that connections are forged and sustained” (584).

80. Felski, 574.

81. See Johnson; and White and Drexler.